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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: FATHER ECHEVERRI: NEXT ROUND OF ELN/GOC
NEGOTIATIONS MORE SYMBOLIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE

REF: BOGOTA 3252

Classified By: Political Counselor Jeffrey DeLaurentis;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Senate Staffer Tim Rieser and Polcouns met with Father Dario Echeverri, Secretary General of the National Conciliation Commission (strictly protect), April 21 to discuss GOC talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN). Echeverri believes the next round of talks, scheduled to begin April 26, will be more symbolic than substantive; he does not expect real progress until after the May 28 presidential elections. Echeverri was frustrated by the ELN's failure to visit Bogota while at the Peace House ("Casa de Paz") outside Medellin earlier in April. He blamed Cuba and Venezuela for persuading the ELN not to visit Bogota because of security concerns. In Echeverri's opinion, the talks are likely to remain in Havana, in part because the closed environment helps the GOC contain the ELN's international profile and appeases Venezuela. Father Echeverri said the Church was willing to play a facilitation role if asked. End Summary.

Progress Slow Until After the Elections

2. (C) Senate Staffer Tim Rieser, accompanied by Polcouns and Poloff (note taker), met with Father Echeverri, Secretary General of the National Conciliation Commission, on April 21. Echeverri said continued negotiations were important for both the GOC and the ELN, but did not expect any real progress at the third round of talks or before presidential elections at the end of May. In his opinion, the third round is designed to maintain momentum, particularly since both sides need to be seen as committed to the process. It will not be a real dialogue. He noted ELN spokesperson Gerardo Antonio Bermudez Sanchez, AKA "Francisco Galan," is irritated with the GOC because of its "obvious mistrust" of the process.

3. (C) According to Echeverri, Galan regards the GOC's refusal to suspend arrest warrants for and provide passports and more extensive travel permission to all members of the ELN leadership as "offensive" and "inadequate." Despite this, Echeverri believes there is a good chance for progress after the elections, particularly because a second-term Uribe administration will not be "starting from scratch" with the

ELN.

ELN Objectives; Continued Narcotrafficking

¶4. (C) Echeverri believes the ELN has a "smaller agenda" than many might suppose, but certain issues are showstoppers. These include a national conference on alternative economic systems, increased regional participation in the peace process and increased GOC attention to humanitarian and social issues. Father Echeverri said he was concerned the ELN's growing involvement narcotrafficking would further complicate the peace process.

April Visit to Medellin Lost Opportunity for ELN

¶5. (C) Echeverri expressed frustration with the ELN for not accepting the Church's offer of safe haven in Bogota while visiting the Casa de Paz outside Medellin. In Echeverri's view, the ELN could have achieved more of its goals with a visit to Bogota. These goals, according to Echeverri, include increased opportunities to interact with civil society groups like university professors and students and indigenous communities. He said the Cubans and Venezuelans convinced Galan and other leaders to remain in Medellin by stressing security concerns (see reftel). Echeverri noted the ironic result of this decision: staying in Medellin thwarted ELN efforts to meet with other groups.

Talks Likely to Remain in Cuba

¶6. (C) Echeverri said talks will likely stay in Havana, despite the ELN's continued interest in moving them to Europe or Panama. He said the GOC is comfortable with the talks remaining in Cuba because the environment is "closed," preventing the ELN from achieving a greater international profile it could not achieve on the battlefield. He also said the GOC has stopped pushing for a Colombia venue in an attempt to appease Venezuela, trading Cuban involvement in the talks for acceptance of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. Echeverri said the Cubans want to remain involved, which could indicate they believe the process is real and important.

Too Many Cooks in the Peace Talks Kitchen

¶7. (C) Rieser noted the confusion that could be caused by the array of guarantors, facilitators, country representatives, civil society groups and commissions involved in the ELN/GOC talks. Echeverri agreed there were too many involved, which complicated the process. He hoped fewer would be involved as talks went forward, but underscored the Church's willingness to play a facilitating role.

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